



Working With “Difficult Personalities”

By Sterling Newberry

Conflict sometimes looks like “clashing personalities”. Often times people will throw up their hands in disgust at such a situation, or tell the people involved to just get over it. This can mask a source of conflict based on peoples’ behavioral preferences.

I believe that all of us come into this world with our own preferences, and that these show up in the workplace. If you want information presented to you in a logical one-two-three format, and I am more attuned to how interpersonal relationships affect the situation, we may become frustrated with each other. What can make things worse, is that we each have a comfort zone around our preferences. This means that, unless I decide to do something differently, I will likely resist your attempts to act outside of my comfort zone, and you likely will do the same.

I don’t think it has to be this way. I think that such differences can work for us, as individuals, and as an organization. I believe that the key is in how we approach such differences, and what we do about them.

AWARENESS

I believe that the first step in working with this type of conflict is in awareness of our own preferences. The more I know about my own comfort zone in working within a given situation, the less likely I will act out of instinct.

This gives me freedom, because it opens up options to me I might not otherwise know are available. I can choose to behave differently when working with someone whose preferences differ from mine, rather than acting defensively .

One way of developing my awareness is through assessment tools. In my own practice I use the DiSC™ family of instruments developed by Inscape Publishing because they have been thoughtfully developed and tested over many years.

The assessment that organizations often start with is DiSC Classic™. It returns a persons’ behavioral preferences profile based on four dimensions of behavioral preferences in the work place. Each profile gives information based on the individuals’ responses to a questionnaire. The results are then debriefed in a workshop.



ACTION

With this information, I can now choose to act differently. One way is to simply let the other person know about my preferences. I can do this by referring to whatever they said or did that triggered my discomfort, and then requesting they do something different.

Another way is to inquire into their preferences in the situation. What do they value? How do they like to do things? What has happened in their lives that illustrates ways in which their behavioral preferences help them to be successful.

The last step is to negotiate ways of interacting that helps each person feel comfortable, and that gets the works of our organization done most effectively.

Personality conflicts are often based on personal preferences that can be surfaced using assessment tools. Awareness and open discussion can help get groups from conflict to being able to work together more effectively.

Sterling Newberry believes that what matters is not what happens, but how you respond. He works with organizations that want to move through change to sustainable solutions, and to become better at continuous improvement. You can reach him at (510) 541-9901, or by email at sterling@thegreaterpossibility.com.